Consumer Protection

Background

Washington consumers should be protected from unfair, discriminatory and predatory business practices.

Solutions

Consumers must receive timely and accurate information so that they are better able to make intelligent, fact-based decisions.

Session Victories

Payday lenders
The Legislature approved SB 5415 to adopt the military's "best practices" for payday loans to military borrowers. This bill aims to protect soldiers who have been deployed from unfair collection and harassment by payday lenders.

Another bill (SB 5484), would require payday lenders to provide business practice, demographic and legal compliance data to the Department of Financial Institutions. Although this measure passed the Senate, it did not come up for a vote in the House of Representatives.

Refund anticipation loans
The Legislature approved SB 5692 to regulate refund anticipation loans – sometimes known as "instant refunds" – offered by tax preparers.

Identity theft
The "credit freeze" bill (SB 5418), will give victims of identity theft the option of prohibiting a credit reporting agency from releasing credit information without their authorization. This allows victims to restore their credit and prevent further unauthorized use while the freeze is in effect.

SB 5939 requires police departments to issue reports on cases of identity theft. Consumers need the police reports to start repairing their credit; investigators need the reports to track down criminals.

SB 6043 requires notification to affected Washington consumers for data security breaches, such as those that recently occurred with ChoicePoint.

SB 5327 would have created the Office of Privacy Protection within the attorney general's office to coordinate privacy information and education. Although this measure passed the Senate, it was not considered by the full House.

Insurance
The Senate and House approved SB 5196 to prohibit companies from taking a life insurance policy on an employee that pays the company when the employee dies, unless the employee provides written consent. An employer may not retaliate against an employee who does not want to be insured.

HB 1561 prohibits life insurers from refusing to insure people who have traveled to Israel, Colombia, Kenya, Nepal or any other country that may have appeared on the State Department watch list, unless it can be statistically shown that the applicant is a greater insurance risk. A companion measure passed the Senate, but the version approved by both chambers originated in the House.

SB 5275 would have ensured that a consumer's credit history may be used only to maintain or lower rates when insurers are looking at renewing policies. Although this measure passed the Senate, it was not considered by the full House.

SB 5452 would have prohibited insurance companies from using genetic testing information as a condition of life insurance unless the applicant already showed signs of disease. SB 5452 was approved by the Senate but was not considered by the full House.

Tenant/landlord relations
SB 5577 will require landlords to pay to relocate tenants when the landlord has neglected maintenance for so long that the building has been condemned.

HB 1640 provides a mechanism for resolving disputes between manufactured/mobile home landlord and tenants. It expands the existing ombudsman service provided to mobile home park owners and mobile home park tenants and managed by the state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to resolve landlord/tenant disputes.

Housing
SB 5767 and HB 2163 together create the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act. This law requires counties, cities, state agencies and service providers to work together to reduce homelessness in Washington by at least 50 percent in the next 10 years. The program is funded with a $10 recording fee on real estate documents and will pay for affordable housing, support services, eviction prevention and a statewide homeless census. This legislation will make a tremendous difference in our communities' efforts to ensure there's a roof over every bed.